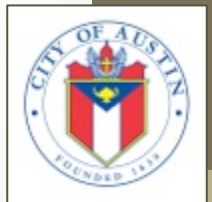# Austin Cemetery Master Plan

Community Meeting #4

November 3, 2014

Agenda

- Introduction (Kim McKnight)
- Project status update (Steph McDougal)
- Rules update (Kim McKnight)
- Capital improvements report (Kevin Johnson)
- Programming recommendations report (Steph McDougal)

What is a Master Plan?
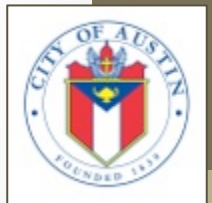
- A master plan is a roadmap or blueprint for the future. The Austin Cemetery Master Plan will:
  - Provide a historic context for the cemeteries
    - How did they develop?
    - What persons buried there played an important role in local, state, or national history?
  - Examine the issues that face the cemeteries, such as:
    - Condition of grave markers, trees and vegetation, infrastructure, buildings, walls and fences, etc.
    - Security and preventing vandalism
    - Legal issues around plot ownership
  - Establish goals for the future
    - Maintenance, restoration, preservation
    - Interpretive programs, signage, partnerships, volunteer corps
  - Outline a plan for achieving those goals

Project Status

- Speak Up Austin surveys
  - Closed November 1
  - Data to be analyzed this month
  - Thank you for participating!
- Schedule for the rest of the project
  - Preliminary concepts for public review (online) – December 1–12
  - Draft for public review (online) – January/February
  - Target date for project completion – March
- Fifth/final community meeting
  - Saturday, January 24, 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
  - Carver Branch/Austin Public Library
  - Present draft Master Plan

How Can You Get Involved?

- Stay up to date via website, meetings, newsletters, email mailing list

- Attend and participate in the fifth community meeting (January)

- Review and comment on preliminary concepts and Master Plan draft when those are posted online

- 311 Line (now available in English and Spanish)

- Send your feedback via email, website, letters

Rules Update

The Cemetery Master Plan Scope of Work already includes:

- "Review the current cemetery rules and procedures and evaluate compliance issues related to grave ornamentation and the installation of unauthorized site furnishings, such as privately-purchased benches. Recommendations shall have consideration for maintenance implications as well as sensitivity towards the needs of cemetery users to memorialize and commemorate loved ones."

- "Make recommendations to guide the development of a dispute resolution process to be integrated into cemetery policies."

Rules Update

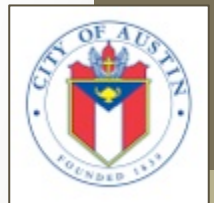The Cemetery Master Plan team additionally has been asked to:

- Summarize the work completed by Smith/Associates
- Review, analyze, and summarize all data by the Master Plan team and Smith/Associates
- Review and summarize best practices regarding gravesite ornamentation in culturally diverse communities
- Review existing and draft revised cemetery rules and identify areas of concern (and/or conflicting opinions) as defined by City staff, Cemetery Master Plan team, and members of the public.
- Develop criteria for evaluating alternative solutions
- Develop a few sample alternative solutions to serve as a starting point for discussion with the community
- Incorporate all rules-related information into a summary report

Rules Update

Following the production of the Master Plan team's report, the City will determine how to proceed. This is likely to include:

- Engaging the community to reach an implementable solution

- Developing gravesite ornamentation rules that can be piloted for 18 months and then reviewed and revised, as necessary

- Completing a formal administrative rules adoption process

- Bringing forward gravesite ornamentation rules for consideration by City Council

- Communicating at all points along the way with the community to achieve transparency and to ensure that all voices are heard and acknowledged

Capital Improvements

Programming Basics

- Educational
  - For children and adults
  - Cemeteries as a lens through which people can understand Austin's history
  - Opportunities to study decorative arts (sculpture, photography)
  - Exploration of different cultural traditions in a diverse community
  - Based on best practices and proven successful programs from around the United States
    - Cemetery walks
    - Partnerships with art museums to interpret monument sculpture

Programming Basics

- Recreation = leisure; something you do in your spare time
  - Primarily for adults
  - Only activities that are respectful of the cemeteries
  - Nothing that would damage the natural or built environment
  - Best practices – different approaches around the country vary based on what is supported by the community. Some cemeteries welcome "active" recreation while others only permit "passive" recreation like walking, bird watching, photography.

Programming: Finding #1

We have two types of city cemeteries.

- Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Annex Cemetery, and Plummers Cemetery are mostly inactive; all spaces are sold and only a few burials each year

- Evergreen Cemetery and Austin Memorial Park Cemetery are actively selling spaces and have hundreds of burials each year

A one-size-fits-all programming plan will not work.

Programming: Finding #2

The community largely supports programming in the three "inactive" cemeteries.

- As long as that programming is respectful and appropriate
- Understanding that Oakwood and Oakwood Annex may have a handful of burials each year and that families and friends still visit graves there

Programming: Finding #3

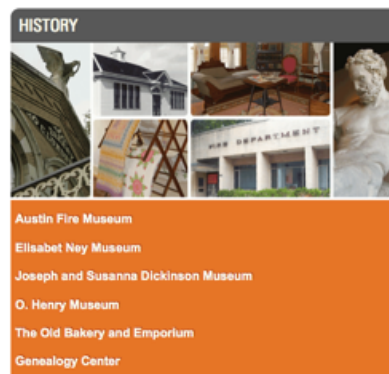Any decisions about programming must be made fairly and objectively.

- A number of people have expressed concern about the City may favor one group or another as potential partners.

- Transparency and good communication are critical.

- The City needs to make sure the community has realistic expectations; the City must live up to those expectations.

- There is no way to make everybody happy. All the City can do is to fairly apply the same criteria when considering all proposed programs and events.

Recommendation #1

Classify Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery as "historic sites" and encourage funding for educational programming.

- Would require additional funding through the city budget process for staff and operations. NO CURRENT CAPACITY FOR THIS.

- Similar programming in the park system is coordinated through the PARD History, Arts, and Nature Division, which oversee historic sites such as the Old Bakery, Elisabet Ney Museum, and the Dickinson and O. Henry Museums.

Recommendation #2

Add one full-time PARD staff person to manage programming at Oakwood Cemetery, Oakwood Cemetery Annex, and Plummers Cemetery.

- This position also can begin to work with stakeholders for Evergreen Cemetery, particularly as it gets closer to having all plots sold.

- The City will not consider recreational or educational programming at Austin Memorial Park Cemetery at this time.

Recommendation #3

Require community groups to apply for permission to hold events at cemeteries.

- Does not include individual use of the cemeteries.

- Sponsoring organization must submit proposal/application.

- Group activities, classes or workshops, and special events may be allowed as long as participants follow PARD rules of cemetery etiquette (to be developed).

- Some portion of program fees must go to support the historic-site cemeteries.

Recommendation #4

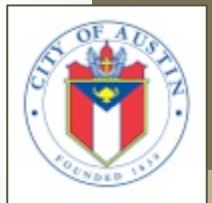Create a Cemeteries Committee to evaluate potential programming.

- Would include a diverse group of residents.
- Would take the decision-making out of the hands of a single person.
- Would include regular public meetings, where members of sponsoring organizations and the public can speak for or against a proposed program/event.
- City has been trying to streamline the number of boards/committees, but Master Plan team believes this one is needed.

Recommendation #5

Establish criteria for evaluating potential programs/events.

- Programs/events should engage visitors and enhance their experience and understanding of the City of Austin and its historic cemeteries.

- Programs/events should highlight or draw attention to a particular aspect of the cemetery (history, art, culture, or nature).

Recommendation #5

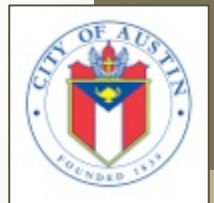Establish criteria for evaluating potential programs/events.

- Presentations should be based on credible information, gathered and documented through research.

- Programs/events will occur within the cemeteries and be temporary in nature (one year or less), with the exception of projects designed to be more permanent, such as the development of interpretive materials, self-guided walking tours, etc.

Recommendation #5

Establish criteria for evaluating potential programs/events.

- Programs/events should have little or no impact on historical, cultural, or natural resources.

- Programs/events should be sensitive to accessibility and safety issues for both visitors and staff.

- Programs/events should include contingency planning in order to respect the privacy of any persons visiting the graves of loved ones or mourners who may be present in the cemetery. Also, Cemetery Manager can work with families and programming to avoid conflicts.

Recommendation #5

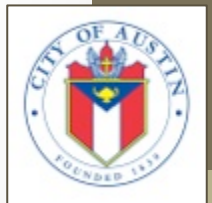Establish criteria for evaluating potential programs/events.

- The proposal must explain how the sponsoring organization will:
  - Provide participants with a copy of PARD cemetery etiquette guidelines;
  - require participants to behave appropriately during the program/ event; and
  - remove participants whose behavior is inappropriate or could damage historical, cultural, or natural resources in the cemetery.
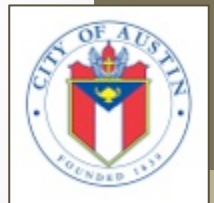
Recommendation #5

Establish criteria for evaluating potential programs/events.

- Programs/events should describe how transportation and parking will be managed.
- Note that parking is not available at Plummers Cemetery.

Selection Criteria

- Ability to increase awareness and appreciation of Austin's historic city cemeteries
- Potential to engage a diverse group of residents
- Potential to benefit the cemetery in some way
- Quality of program content
- Projected attendance and ability of sponsoring organization to manage expected number of participants
- Ability to ensure safety, accessibility, and security

What do you think?